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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0731
RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE 0134
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000086

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: IS NEW ZEALAND OPEN OR OPPOSED TO ADDED AFGHAN
DEPLOYMENTS?

Classified By: Embassy Wellington Charge David J. Keegan. Reasons E.O.
12958, 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) March 25, New Zealand Foreign Minister Murray McCully gave his first public speech on the bilateral relationship with the United States (full text emailed to EAP/ANP). He started with his overall assessment:

"Relations are, in my judgment, in better shape than we have seen in 25 years. That has been the result of careful and constructive effort on both sides over recent years."

Reviewing parallel efforts to address economic recovery and free trade, he added: "In time, it is my hope that the new administration will reaffirm the US commitment to the (TransPacific Partnership) agreement."

¶2. (U) He then turned to Afghanistan. He noted New Zealand's decision to extend current deployment of a PRT to Bamyan Province to September 2010. Regarding additional deployments, McCully said:

"The new (U.S.) Administration has made no secret of the fact that they would like others to do more. And I expect other contributors to the International Security Assistance Force will also want to discuss the way ahead with us. While, of course, we will give consideration to the views expressed by our friends, it is important to note that New Zealand has already made, continues to make, and has just extended, what in our terms is a very significant commitment to the Afghanistan effort. . . So we will keep the situation under review and monitor developments carefully as we move forward"

¶3. (C) Immediately before presenting his speech, McCully told me that his statement on Afghanistan had been crafted to be "open." No decision has been made. None is being signaled. Prime Minister John Key has been thoroughly briefed on this issue and discussed it with McCully several times. The purpose of the statement, McCully insisted, is to give the PM "head room" to enable him to make a decision either to commit additional resources or not.

¶4. (C) As McCully heads to Washington for meetings April 6 and 7, he said that New Zealand fully understands it will be asked by the U.S. to make an additional commitment. Before deciding on its response, New Zealand will wait to see what commitments NATO countries agree to make. He made it clear that New Zealand believes the first responsibility for making additional commitments lies with them. At the same time, New Zealand will be completing its own defense and Afghanistan

review, and Foreign Affairs and Defence will prepare a recommendation to the PM.

15. (C) After the speech, David Taylor, Director of the Americas Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) repeated to me that the statement on Afghanistan was designed to give the Government "head room." That meant not only keeping the Government's deployment options open, he said. It also meant allowing for an orderly withdrawal from Afghanistan if the mission there fails, a possibility he asserted everyone acknowledged.

16. (C) While McCully insisted that no decision was being signaled, a banker who attended the speech and a noted academic who read the speech have both told me that they clearly understood McCully to be saying that New Zealand would commit no more troops to Afghanistan. The senior political writer at the Dominion Post, Tracy Watkins, headlined the same conclusion.

17. (C) Comment. Which should we believe - McCully's assurances or commentators' negative conclusions? The key may lie in a recent Australian opinion poll. In another aside, McCully asked if I had noted a poll published that morning showing that two-thirds of Australians oppose additional deployments to Afghanistan. If that same mood begins to appear here, it could undermine the interest of the avowedly pro-American National Government in New Zealand to make additional commitments to Afghanistan. If we want to encourage a New Zealand deployment, we will need to find public diplomacy opportunities to explain the choices in

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Afghanistan to New Zealand media. We will also need to work directly to encourage PM Key and FM McCully.
KEEGAN